

BACKGROUND INFO: Rural Communities Still Feeling Recession

Effects of Recession Still Felt in Rural Counties

Posted By [Steven Johnson](#) On January 19, 2015 @ 3:00 am In [Editor's Pick, Trends, Reports & Analyses](#) | [Comments Disabled](#)

The recession officially ended in 2009, but it still casts a cloud over many small, rural counties.

The National Association of Counties says many areas, including rural America, are struggling to return to pre-recession economic activity. (Photo By: Getty Images/iStockphoto)

That's one of the findings [in a report issued Jan. 12](#) ^[2] by the National Association of Counties, which said large swaths of the United States are still struggling to regain lost economic activity.

"Economic growth is spreading, but most county economies have not recovered to levels seen before the recession," said Emilia Istrate, director of research for the association. "This progress through adversity illustrates the success of county economic development efforts, but it also shows the need for collaboration in securing a strong economy," she added.

By the group's estimate, 95 percent of county economies still have not returned to pre-recession unemployment levels.

The study, *County Economic Tracker 2014*, looked at 3,069 county economies. Under the definitions, large counties have more than 500,000 residents. Medium-sized counties have 50,000 to 500,000 residents. Small counties have less than 50,000 residents, which demographers often use as a shorthand for rural.

In 2014, those economies accounted for 2 million new net jobs, adjusted for job losses, which was one and a half times as many as in 2013. The lion's share was in large county economies, which produced more jobs than their numbers would suggest, the association said.

Though large counties have 49 percent of employment in all counties, they generated 57 percent of new jobs in 2014.

By contrast, small county economies created almost 150,000 net new jobs in 2014, about 7 percent of the total. Still, that was a change from 2013, when job creation in small counties was nearly stagnant.

As measured by gross domestic product, small counties lagged in economic output. About half of small counties have recovered by that indicator, compared with more than 60 percent of medium and large counties.

On the positive side, nearly half of the new jobs in small counties paid more than the average wage in the specific county under study. Researchers attributed that to a boom in oil, gas and mining, which has boosted economies in places like Alaska, Texas and North Dakota.

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